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# ORGANIZATION OF THE HOUSE.

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## REMARKS

OF

## MR. KENNETT, OF MISSOURI,

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, JANUARY 9, 1856,

*On the election of Speaker and the organization of the House of Representatives.*

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Mr. KENNETT said :

Mr. CLERK: I move that the resolution limiting debate to speeches of ten minutes be rescinded; and on that motion, as the custom seems to be tolerated by the House, I desire to submit a few remarks upon the condition of things here at this moment.\* [Cries of "Go on!"] I trust gentlemen will not weary with a little talking. If we are to remain here all night—perhaps all day tomorrow, as it would seem to be the determination of certain parties we shall do—I prefer a little "promiscuous spouting" to the dull monotony of constantly calling the roll; but I protest all the time against this compulsory, protracted sitting. I would prefer to see gentlemen come fairly up to the scratch, and do directly and openly what they thus propose to accomplish by indirection and strategy.

Who are the men, Mr. Clerk, who are voting with the Republicans against adjournment, determined, as they have declared in caucus, to keep the House in session until a Speaker is elected? The immortal seventy-four—the simon-pures, who represent the Administration on this floor! And do they hope, if they succeed in *forcing* an election, that the honorable gentleman from Illinois will be the occupant of that vacant chair? By no means! They have not the remotest idea of such a result. The gentleman from Virginia, [Mr. McMULLIN,] just now, in remonstrating against this night session, charged distinctly upon his party friends, the Democracy, that they had no such hope. Do they intend to come over to South America? They would, doubtless, indignantly repel such an imputation. The conclusion is then inevitable, that they are holding the House in session to-night with the hope of gaining a partisan advantage, *in futuro*, by the election of the gentleman from Massachusetts, [Mr. BANKS.] If this be so, I repeat, it would be better for them to come out like men—come boldly up—and vote for the plurality rule, thus electing Mr. BANKS, and taking the responsibility before the country. By so doing, they will save us the repetition of the pathetic interludes taking place around us, of members making their nuncupative wills, bequeathing to the House the last words of wisdom that fall, like droppings from the sanctuary, from lips that may never again be opened to

\* Nine o'clock, p. m.

express their preference for BANKS, RICHARDSON, or FULLER. [Great laughter.] We shall be spared the affecting leave-takings and explanations of those whose duty to their "families and friends," compels them to pair-off, and go home to supper, "with what appetite they may," rather than remain here to test the question of *physical endurance*. Well, sir, I am not very strong—and as this is the first time I have attempted to address the House, so also it may be the last—and I had, perhaps, better occupy the time that remains to me in giving some reasons why I have stood, and still intend to stand, by the gentleman from Pennsylvania, in casting my vote for Speaker. But first, I must say, that I have no long telegraphic dispatches from home to read to the House, after the manner of honorable members from Ohio. Nor have I even a letter to produce, announcing that my friends and constituents are delighted with the course I have been pursuing. I take it for granted, however, the people of my district are satisfied to leave their interests in my hands, and are content with my conduct, or they would have complained, which they have not. This, at least, seems to me a fair inference. They, as I suppose, consider my action so manifestly right, that it *needs no backing up*. It is only in doubtful cases that public opinion is *made to order, and furnished in quantities to suit!*

It is very true, sir, and I might say "pity 'tis 'tis true," that our prospect of electing my friend, the honorable gentleman from Pennsylvania, is not very flattering. But we have the consolation, like the good old lady in Missouri, who raised no corn year before last, *of knowing that none of our neighbors are any better off*. The other divisions, or factions, or what else you may choose to call them, on this floor, stand respectively in the same category, and are satisfied to do so—unless I except my friends, the Democrats, who do not seem content to be ranked with other people; but, if I may be permitted to remark, without intending anything discourteous to them, they, like the Pharisees of old, wrap themselves in their cloaks of political righteousness, and devoutly thank God that they are *not* as other people are. [Renewed laughter.] I say they seem to thank God that they *are* better than other men—better than the one hundred and fifty other men who stand in opposition to them on this floor. The fact cannot be disputed, that more than one hundred and fifty of the two hundred and thirty members of this House have been elected as opponents of the present Administration of the National Government. It may be said, and truly, that that Opposition differ among themselves—that they are not united, and cannot unite, in their efforts to elect a Speaker. But surely it does not follow, for that reason, either that the friends of Mr. RICHARDSON are themselves entitled to the speakership, or that they are released from all responsibility in electing that officer. They will not be held blameless in the premises, I can assure them, though they may claim exemption on the ground that they are a *larger body* than the conservatives who are voting for Mr. FULLER. The BANKS men make a larger party in the House than *they*, and, if this ground is good, should have the Speaker. Is it because they are a small minority, these Democratic gentlemen should be released from their share of blame for non-organization? We can say to them, as would an Irishman under the circumstances, *we are twice as small as you*. [Great laughter.] And to go still further down, the half dozen outsiders who have been voting from the commencement for almost anybody in general and nobody in particular, can still less be saddled, by this mode of reasoning, with any responsibility in the premises. It is true, some of their especial friends are of a different way of thinking; but this is a family quarrel in which I do not choose to interfere; not exactly, perhaps, for the same reason the woman gave for not interfering between the bear and her husband, viz: because she did not care which whipped. (my sympathies being

in this case altogether with the weaker party, who are so stubbornly resisting the *outside pressure*,) but because it is prudent to keep clear of *family jars*.

And now, Mr. Clerk, seriously let me ask, what has this party—the Democratic, upon which, as I contend, the great responsibility does rest of organizing the House—done towards effecting that object? They have offered us the highly honorable gentleman from Illinois, [Mr. RICHARDSON,] my friend, and one for whom, under certain circumstances, I could and would have voted with the greatest pleasure. I have not required that that gentleman should be taken down, and some other put in his place, in order that I might vote for a Democrat for Speaker. I believe he is amongst the best, if not the noblest Roman, of them all—my neighbor—a western man—devoted to western interests; and I could have voted for him with great pleasure, and would still, could my vote elect him in opposition to a Republican or Abolitionist, had I now, or ever, since the first attempt to organize the House, been afforded a fair opportunity. But neither I, nor one of the friends with whom I act, have ever had either such opportunity or a reasonable excuse for doing so. These gentlemen have elevated their candidate upon a platform *intended to be inaccessible to me and my friends*, by which they say they intend to stand, and upon which, if necessary, they propose to die. They have tauntingly told us they would not even hold out a helping hand from that platform to lift us upon it, though we should desert our flag and our principles, and make an effort to get there; but we must *crawl up* as best we may, at the risk of breaking our necks in the attempt; and even then must come with ropes round our necks, ready to be hanged for our pains. [Laughter.] Rather severe terms for the doubtful pleasure of taking a bitter pill; for such most of us would consider a vote for a Democrat under any circumstances—an alternative only tolerable as a last resort. If we had known our friends were determined to be so hard on us, and that the resolution of their caucus was to be binding here, and to be henceforth inexorably enforced, for one I should have brought my *coffin* up with me to-day, and had it conveniently at hand in the lobby, [great laughter,] as I too intend still to stand by my friend, the gentleman from Pennsylvania, [Mr. FULLER,] *and die in my tracks, if need be*. I vote for him because he is against agitation—sound on the slavery question—and a conservative, Union-loving statesman, whose ability for the place is undoubted, and whose high character and spotless integrity would insure impartiality in the discharge of the duties of the position. I do not object to him on account of his antecedents, however they may stick in the throats of some. His present record, I am sure, will stand the test with my constituents.

But, recurring to the immediate question of organization, I say the Democratic party (*as they contend*, the only national party of the country) have not shown such anxiety for its organization as was demanded of them by their position as supporters of the Administration, now some three years in power. I say a greater responsibility does, for this reason, (that they have possession of the Government, and are bound to carry it on,) rest with *them* than with any other party or body of men in this House; and that they have not done what was demanded of them under the circumstances, to wit: *made every effort in their power consistent with sound principle to effect an organization*; on the contrary, they have made no effort whatever at conciliation—not the first step in the right direction towards securing this desirable result. I am willing that this assertion shall go forth to the country. I desire that it may; and I think, if time and my strength would permit, I could sustain the proposition satisfactorily. Have they offered us as a compromise man my colleague, Mr. CARUTHERS, the friend at my side, an old-line Whig, now acting with themselves, and voting for Mr. RICHARDSON, as he thinks it is his duty and has a right to do in the present crisis of



affairs; or, on the other hand, have they presented  
*another old-line Whig*, who has been acting with ...  
 Americans on this floor, who, though he is *with* is not one *of* them, and, there-  
 fore, ought to be exceptionable to them, and might have been so to a majority  
 of the House? I ask, have they offered either of these, or made any other effort,  
 in the spirit of conciliation or compromise towards an organization? They have  
 not, and the country will hold them accountable for their shortcomings, and  
 responsible for resulting ills.

The CLERK. The gentleman's time has expired. [Cries of "Go on!" "Go  
 on!"]

The CLERK. If there is no objection, the gentleman will proceed with his  
 remarks.

Mr. KENNETT. I will not trespass further on the time of the House; I  
 have done.



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